

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH COMMENCEMENT

Remarks for Administrator Bolden

April 26, 2015

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

To my friend, Dr. Patrick Gallagher; to Chairman Tritch and the Board of Trustees; to the faculty and staff; to all the parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, children, grandchildren, and friends who are with us ... it's an honor to share this very special day with all of you.

To the Class of 2015 – this is my favorite part – congratulations! You did it!

With your new Pittsburgh diploma comes a piece of a very significant legacy.

From Gene Kelley to Andrew Mellon to Nancy Cartright ... from Lap-Chee-Tsui to Roscoe Robinson to Geri Allen ... from John Woodruff to Susan Arnold, Dan Marino, Freddie Fuand Michael Chabon... Pitt alumni have literally danced, dreamed, philosophized, discovered, commanded, composed, run, led, played, written and healed their way into the future.

They've raised families, raised the bar and at times they've raised hell.

Just imagine what *you'll* do ...

HELP WANTED

Pittsburgh is sometimes called "The City of Bridges." It is said to have more bridges than any American city or region. One of these bridges is right here where you're sitting. You see, a graduation is a bridge. It's a bridge between classroom and career. It's a bridge between present and future. In a sense, it's a bridge between this generation and the next.

You're crossing this bridge at a pivotal moment in human history. Our planet has a very big "help wanted" sign on it – *trust me on this, you can see it from space (not really)* – and we're counting on your generation. We're counting on you to cure the previously incurable ... to tackle big challenges like climate change ... to teach us to live as one people on this beautiful planet.

You're part of the generation that will travel to an asteroid ... that will walk the face of Mars ... and, yes ... will return home safely.

SERVICE

As you set foot on this bridge, I have a few pieces of advice for you. The first concerns not just where you'll go, but how you'll get there.

Although this is only my second time in Pittsburgh, I feel right at home here, because even though I grew up many miles away in South Carolina, I'm a longstanding *Steelers* fan.

I bring this up for a reason. One of the great things about the *Steelers* organization is that they stand for something. As much as they've given us to admire on the field – winning 6 super bowls will do that – they've also given us much to admire *off* the field.

One of these things is the “Rooney Rule” that has created opportunity for minority coaches and front office personnel and given a generation of kids the aspiration and inspiration to someday be coaches and general managers.

The *Steelers* also lead by example when it comes to the important work that players, staff and coaches alike do in the Western Pennsylvania community.

That's a worthy example for all of us to keep in mind – and something for you to consider as you embark on your careers. I can tell you that as NASA Administrator, my top priority is our people. It's a great source of pride that at the same time we're reaching new heights in space and aeronautics, we're also the #1 rated, best place to work in the federal government three years running. (*And hint, hint, we're hiring!*)

When you're a great place to work, the best and the brightest want to come and work for you and with you. What's more, they tend to want to keep working with you, too.

So the first my piece of advice is to keep in mind that your success is not only about the work you do, but *how* you do it.

Teamwork

It's also about with *whom* you work.

The legendary *Steelers* coach Chuck Noll, who passed last year, once said that, quote: *“I can't tell you how much you gain, how much progress you can make, by working together as a team, by helping one another. You get much more done that way. If there's anything the Steelers of the '70s epitomized, I think it was that teamwork.”* End quote.

I'll attest from my firsthand experience that this holds true whether you're leading Marines, flying combat missions, or piloting a mission in space.

None of us wouldn't be here were it not for the shoulders on which we stood. So my second piece of advice is *“don't let a day pass that you don't approach someone who means a lot to you and thank them for just being themselves and for helping you be you.”*

With this in mind, graduates, I hope you'll join me in showing appreciation for your team – the parents and grandparents who cared for you and got you here; your family members and friends who have stood by you and traveled near and far to be with you today. Join me in a round of applause for them.

In my life, I've been blessed to go to space four times, and to travel to nearly every corner of our planet. Nothing I've seen compares to the awe of looking into the eyes of my children and grandchildren. If you choose to start a family, love and care for them every single day as your loved ones have cared for you.

DON'T LISTEN TO ANYONE WHO SAYS YOU CAN'T DO SOMETHING OR DON'T BELONG

That brings me to my third piece of advice – it's a lesson my parents taught me and my wife and I try to teach our own kids and grandkids: Be bold, be fearless, dream big, and by all means, don't listen to anyone who tells you can't do something or you don't belong. Don't waste your time trying to explain yourself or your identity to anyone. Don't feel like you have to justify why you are where you are. This applies to the workplace or anywhere else.

In my younger days, my dream was to attend the U.S. Naval Academy and to serve my country – just as my father and my uncles had done in World War II, when African Americans had to fight for the right to serve in our Armed Forces. Growing up during the days of segregation here in the U.S., it was an uphill battle. When I came of age, no one in my South Carolina congressional delegation would provide an appointment nor nomination to the Academy as was required for admission. So I wrote President Johnson asking for help. I never got a response, but that possibly led to Congressman William Dawson of Illinois providing me the appointment I needed to be accepted. Rep. Dawson was himself a veteran of World War I and only the third African American elected to Congress in the 20th century.

After having to fight just for the opportunity to be admitted, my classmates at the Naval Academy did me the honor of electing me class president.

Today, after a 34-year career in the Marine Corps, I have the honor of serving as Administrator of NASA under the nation's first Black President.

Now when I say, "dream big" that doesn't mean you'll always know what the future holds. Growing up, I never conceived that some day I'd become a Marine Corps jet pilot, let alone pilot the space shuttle. When I finally made the decision to apply for the astronaut program, I was 34 years old and serving as a Marine Corps test pilot. Before that I had never even thought about being an astronaut – I figured it was just out of the question.

THE SPACE GENERATION

So my fourth piece of advice is to never stop reaching for new heights, even if you don't know exactly what they look like or what they will be. This applies both to you personally and to your generation as a whole.

There is a big handoff that's about to take place. Bigger than Roethlisberger handing off to Le'Veon Bell. Bigger even than Cower handing off to Tomlin. I'm talking about the handoff from my generation to yours.

Your generation is going to take the things that people of my generation started and make them your own.

Remember I talked about that "Help Wanted" sign? It's your generation – each and everyone of you in the Class of 2015 sitting here today – that's going to provide that help ... that's going to prove something President Kennedy said (and I quote) "*No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings.*" (End quote)

I want to invite you to close your eyes for a moment and imagine a future where human beings and robots work together to pioneer Mars and the Solar System.

Today, we're further along on our Journey to Mars than ever before in human history and it's your generation that's going to complete this journey. You're going to land human beings on Mars. Think about that for a moment. The feet in the first boots on the Red Planet could be here with us today.

I call your generation the "space generation" because of the expansive way you look at our world, our universe and the possibilities they contain.

When I talk to my own grandchildren, the question they ask me isn't whether or not we'll someday go to Mars. It's "*why stop there?*"

You've come of age in a world where Skyping with someone half a world away is just a routine part of life. That used to be the stuff of science fiction.

You live in a world where astronauts from many nations fly together in space every single day and where we're preparing to extend the human presence farther into the solar system. That used to be science fiction, too.

We're only a few months away from the *New Horizons* spacecraft's arrival in the Pluto system. When that happens the United States will have flown by or visited every single planet and dwarf planet in the solar system.

At the same time, we're only a couple years away from sending the James Webb Space Telescope a million miles into space – which will open the door to finding undiscovered planets and galaxies. Already the Hubble Space Telescope – which at 25 years old and going strong is older than many of you – is giving scientists enough new data and discovery to fill the entire Library of Congress, every single year.

We're moving beyond the limits of our own imagination.

It's conceivable that in your lifetime, we'll locate a planet like Earth orbiting a star in another solar system.

A child born this year will never have known a time when commercial companies were not regularly carrying cargo to space ... or human beings weren't living and working aboard the International Space Station.

Perhaps your own children and grandchildren will never know a time when human beings haven't been living on Mars.

You might have heard President Obama declare, we're pushing out into the Solar System not just to visit but to stay. This isn't science fiction – it's your generation's future.

CONCLUSION

I want to leave you with a story. It's about the great American aviator Charles Lindberg.

The year is 1927. Lindberg is flying to Mexico. The weather is foggy and rainy. After flying over the Texas border, Lindberg realizes something. He's completely lost. Unsure of where he's headed, he gets an idea. He'll fly real low and look for a landmark. So he takes his plane down nice and low and as luck would have it, he spots some train tracks. After following the tracks he breathes a sigh of relief. He's found a train station. He figures he'll get low enough to read the sign on the station and check to see where he is on his map.

He spots a sign. It says "Caballeros." He pulls out his trusty map, but sure as the world, he can't find Caballeros anywhere on the map. So he keeps flying. He gets to another station, finds another sign, and wouldn't you know it? It says exactly the same thing. Caballeros. Now at this point you can only imagine how confused he is. Apparently there are two Caballeros in Mexico and neither of them is on his map! He keeps flying until finally he realizes something. Caballeros isn't a place. It's the Spanish word for "Gentleman." The signs he keeps seeing don't refer to the name of a city or town. They mark the entrance to the men's restroom.

This brings me my final piece of advice: don't be afraid to fail. Even the very best get lost sometime and anyone who tells you they know exactly where we are headed, probably isn't being straight with you.

Graduates, while no one can tell you for sure where our world is headed in the years to come, I believe that your generation will take us to a better place. A place worthy of the planet I've been blessed to see from space -- where its serenity and lack of political borders belies the truth of what sometimes happens on the ground.

As you cross this great Pittsburgh bridge into your future, I fully expect that you'll build this better world and in the finest University of Pittsburgh tradition, you'll do it by dancing, dreaming, discovering, drawing, inventing, creating, thinking, playing, writing, running, healing, helping and imagining your way into the future.

God bless you and God bless America.

Go Panthers ... and Go Steelers!